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USCINCENT//CCPA, USCENCOM REAR MACDILL AFB FL
STATE PASS TO AID

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, September 18, highlight the "skeptical" U.S. reaction to Iraq's acceptance of the unconditional return of the weapons inspectors. Stories focus on President Bush's remarks of September 17 that the Security Council "must not be fooled" by Iraq's "questionable promise" and calling on the international community to "deal with" the Iraqi President. All papers also highlight Jordan's official reaction to Iraq's decision, which praised the Iraqi decision as "a positive step towards the resumption of constructive dialogue between Iraq and the United Nations." Majority of editorial commentaries praise Iraq's "intelligent" decision, but warn that the U.S. remains intent on pursuing hostilities against Iraq.

Editorial Commentary

-- "A sigh of relief"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (09/18) editorializes: "Some in the region are sighing with relief, although the feeling would seem temporary. Iraq's eleventh hour decision to allow U.N. weapons inspectors back was welcomed in Jordan, embraced in the rest of the Arab world, and hailed by China and Russia. But it was met with suspicion and skepticism in London and Washington. Jordan and most Arab countries have repeated over the past few weeks that Iraq's unconditional acceptance of U.N. arms inspectors would make it much more difficult for Washington to justify a war. Much more difficult does not mean impossible. The Iraqi leadership made a wise and timely decision yesterday. It did its part to avoid a war. At this stage, peace-loving nations can only take Iraq's commitment to allow U.N. inspectors back at face value."

-- "The possibility of a war still stands"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (09/18): "Baghdad's unconditional acceptance of the return of the inspectors does change the climate of the political confrontation with the United States and the Security Council. Yet, it is too early to conclude that the crisis has taken a different turn from that of American military aggression against Iraq. The possibility of a war is still high, because Washington wants to oust the regime. That is its main objective and the issue of the return of the inspectors is nothing but a pretext."

-- "Was Baghdad successful in buying some time?"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (09/18): "The problem with the Iraqi decision is that it came in the eleventh hour. This gives the impression that it is a 'maneuver' and not an 'initiative'. This is the basis for the American and British rejection of the Iraqi decision. I assume we are going to hear much more in the next few days about Iraq 'lacking seriousness' and the 'maneuvering' aspect of the Iraqi decision. Needless to say, Iraq managed to buy itself some time and this is good in itself, particularly if this time is used well to launch a diplomatic mission that eliminates the ghost of war altogether."

-- "The repercussions of the Iraqi decision"

Daily columnist Basem Sakijha writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (09/18): "Changing the Iraqi regime remains the

objective of the U.S. policy. It is an objective that cannot be attained by a Security Council resolution. Therefore, the United States will continue to focus on marginal issues, opening one file after another, until the final provocation that will be the justification for the war."

-- "Washington's utmost hallucination"

Daily columnist Bateer Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (09/18): "No one can understand or accept the American justifications for striking Iraq, particularly after Iraq agreed to the unconditional return of the inspectors. What does Washington want? Washington wants Iraqi oil. It wants a regime that achieves all its interests in the region. It wants to destroy any weapons that can threaten Israel. Iraq's decision marks a very intelligent step. It exposed America's lies completely. It is now up to the Arab countries and Europe to employ the Iraqi stand in favor of all concerned. Washington can continue its hallucinations about war, but it is important that no Arab or European country listen to those hallucinations. No one wants to start a war in the region except Israel, American oil companies, and some of the Iraqi opposition groups."

GNEHM